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Message Text

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21
ACTION ARA-10

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E. O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT BF
SUBJ: FIVE ACCUSED POLICEMEN MEET UNRULY CROWD

REF: NASSAU 461

1. SUMMARY: FIVE BAHAMIAN POLICEMEN ACCUSED OF MANSLAUGHTER IN DEATH OF PRISONER WHILE IN THEIR CUSTODY HAD THEIR FIRST DAY IN COURT MARCH 19. HEARING IS BEING HELD BEFORE CHIEF MAGISTRATE AS PRELIMINARY TO SUPREME COURT TRIAL. AT LUNCH BREAK, CROWD OF PERHAPS 300 BAHAMIANS TRIED TO RUSH DEFENDANTS AS THEY EMERGED FROM COURT. ACCUSED AND THEIR LAWYERS HAD TO FLEE DOWN NASSAU'S MAIN STREET AND TAKE REFUGE IN RESTAURANT UNTIL POLICE ARRIVED TO SLIP THEM THROUGH BACK DOOR AND CLEAR CROWD FROM STREET, LATTER ACTION ENTAILING SEVERAL SCUFFLES AND ARRESTS. THE FIVE, AND ROYAL BAHAMAS POLICE FORCE GENERALLY, ARE PRESENTLY TARGETS OF MUCH "GRASS ROOTS" HOSTILITY WHICH HAS NOT, HOWEVER, ESCALATED INTO VOCAL ANGER AT GCOB PER SE. END SUMMARY.

2. EMB POLOFF NOTED CROWD GATHERING OUTSIDE MAGISTRATE'S COURT MORNING OF MARCH 19 WHILE HE WAS ON WAY TO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY SESSION. CROWD WAS COMPOSED OF MOSTLY YOUNG BLACK MALES, APPARENTLY UNEMPLOYED, AND REPORTEDLY RESIDENTS OF THE POOR NEIGHBORHOOD IN WHICH DECEASED PRISONER LIVED. SOME MEMBERS CARRIED BASEBALL BATS AND PIECES OF TWO-BY-FOUR LUMBER, LATTER ALLEGEDLY TYPE OF INSTRUMENT USED BY POLICE ON
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DECEASED. CROWD SULLEN, WITH SOME THREATENING AND MANY BITTER

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COMMENTS HEARD.

3. AT LUNCH BREAK, FIVE ACCUSED POLICE OFFICERS EMERGED WITH ATTORNEYS. CROWD SURGED FORWARD, BATS AND CLUBS RAISED, WHILE DEFENDANTS RE-ENTERED COURT AND QUICKLY RE-EMERGED FROM SIDE ENTRANCE, WALKING QUICKLY DOWN STREET, SCATTERED POLICE ELEMENTS TRIED TO RESTRAIN CROWD UNSUCCESSFULLY AS IT RAN AFTER ACCUSED. POLICE SCUFFLED WITH SEVERAL DEMONSTRATORS AND THERE WERE MINOR INJURIES. CROWD GATHERED ADHERENTS AS IT PROCEEDED DOWN BAY STREET, INCLUDING SEVERAL DRUNKS AND OTHER INDIGENOUS FIXTURES OF THAT THOROUGHFARE. DEFENDANTS WERE CORNERED AFTER THREE BLOCK RUN AND TOOK REFUGE IN PROMINENT RESTAURANT. CROWD SURROUNDED RESTAURANT, TRIED TO PREVENT SOME PERSONS FROM LEAVING IT, BUT MADE NO ATTEMPT TO ENTER. CROWD OVERFLOWED BOTH SIDES OF STREET, STOOK ON PARKED CARS, AND BROUGHT TRAFFIC TO A CRAWL. FOUR OR FIVE PLAINCLOTHES POLICE ARRIVED AND ATTEMPTED TO MOVE CROWD. THIS ATTEMPT UNSUCCESSFUL AND THEIR PRESENCE AROUSED AUDIBLE HOSTILITY IN CROWD (ALL FIVE DEFENDANTS ARE PLAINCLOTHES DETECTIVES).

4. AFTER ABOUT 20 MINUTES, THIRTY OR SO UNIFORMED POLICE ARRIVED IN MARKED CARS. AT FIRST, ATTEMPT WAS MADE TO MOVE CROWD FROM STREET BY NUDGING ITS MEMBERS ALONG WITH CAR BUMPERS BUT THIS TACTIC WAS WISELY ABANDONED. UNIFORMED POLICE FINALLY DISPERSED CROWD AT COST OF SEVERAL FIGHTS AND ARRESTS FOR DISORDERLY CONDUCT.

5. SOME MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ARRIVED TO VIEW CROWD BEHAVIOR AFTER HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY RECESS. FIRST TO ARRIVE WERE ED MOXEY AND OSCAR JOHNSON, PLP DISSIDENTS AND SELF-PROCLAIMED SPOKESMENT FOR OPPRESSED BAHAMIANS. NEITHER ATTEMPTED TO ADDRESS CROWD OR DISPERSE IT. THEIR PRESENCE AROUSED NO CROWD RESPONSE, PRO OR CON. PM PINDLING WAS DRIVEN THROUGH SILENT CROWD IN LIMOUSINE WITH RATHER TENSE-LOOKING BODYGUARDS, BUT HIS PRESENCE ELICITED NO OBVIOUS HOSTILITY FROM CROWD, ALTHOUGH TWO MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN YELLED AT HIM TO "GET OUT OF HERE."

6 REMARKS HEARD FROM CROWD WERE CENTERED ON ALLEGED POLICE BRUTALITY AND CORRUPTION, WITH PREDICTION THAT LATTER WOULD
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RESULT IN DEFENDANTS ESCAPING PUNISHMENT. CROWD SENTIMENT DID NOT APPEAR TO SPILL OVER FROM REMARKS AGAINST POLICE TO CRITICISMS OF PINDLING GOVERNMENT AS WHOLE, HOWEVER. NEVERTHELESS, MOOD OF CROWD, READINESS TO TRANSLATE THAT MOOD INTO ACTION, AND UNWILLINGNESS TO DISPERSE WHEN ORDERED TO BY POLICE, WERE ALL HIGHLY UNUSUAL BY BAHAMIAN STANDARDS. POLICE PROTECTION OF DEFENDANTS AND SENSITIVITY TOWARD POSSIBILITY OF CROWD ACTIVITY AGAINST THEM WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HEIGHTEN.

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POLOFF TALKED WITH CHIEF DEFENSE COUNSEL WALLACE-WHITFIELD
LATE WEDNESDAY, WHO SAID THAT HE HOPED HE WOULD NEVER AGAIN
HAVE A DAY LIKE MARCH 19 BUT THAT, GIVEN THE CENTRALIZATION
OF COURTS IN NASSAU, HE SAW LITTLE POINT IN REQUESTING A
CHANGE IN VENUE FOR HIS CLIENTS.
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